

## Chapter 5—The Good/Bad Binary

### Summary Points

This chapter explores what is perhaps the most effective adaption of racism in recent history: the good/bad binary

Here is how the good/binary was made possible—why history is important!

- o Prior to the Civil Rights Movement white people could openly proclaim their belief and allegiance to their racial superiority. These images of white superiority became the archetypes of racism. *After* the Civil Rights Movement, to be a good and moral person meant that you could not be complicit with racism; only bad people were racist. They became mutually exclusive. Practically this meant that to call someone racist was to deliver a deep moral blow to their character. Such a binary makes it virtually impossible to talk to white people about racism. Why? Again, because to the good/bad binary reduced racism to individual egregious acts that only bad people do—that only those in the south perform.

- o Omowale Akintunde's comment: racism is a systemic, societal, institutional, omnipresent, and epistemologically embedded phenomenon that pervades every vestige of our reality. For most whites, however, racism is like murder: the concept exists, but someone has to commit it in order for it to happen. This limited

view of such a multilayered syndrome cultivates the sinister nature of racism and perpetuates it.” 72

o WE ARE ALL AFFECTED BY THE FORCES OF RACISM AS A MEMBER OF SOCIETY IN WHICH RACISM IS THE BEDROCK.

Although individual racists acts do occur, these acts are part of a larger system of interlocking dynamics. 73

o The simplistic idea that racism is limited to individual intentional acts committed by unkind people is at the root of virtually all white defensiveness on this topic.

## Reflection Questions

1. In the white mind, what qualifies as racism? If your response is that it depends on the individual, then see DiAngelo’s definition of racism. If mostly everyone else is saying that it is systematic, why are we hesitant to believe them?

2. How do the claims below function in the conversation?

Color Blind	Color Celebrate
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I was taught to treat everyone the same	I work in a very diverse environment
I don't see color	I have people of color in my family/married a person of color
I don't care if you are pink, purple, or polka dotted	I was in the military
Race doesn't have any meaning to me	I used to live in New York/hawaii
My parents weren't racists so that is why I am not	We don't like how white our neighborhood is, but we had to move here for the schools
Everyone struggles, but if you work hard... (this is called meritocracy)	I was in the peace corps
So and so just happens to be black, but that has nothing to do with what im about to tell you	I marched the sixties
Focusing on race is what divides us	We adopted a child from china
If people are respectful to me, I am respectful to them, regardless of race	Our grandchildren are multiracial
Children today are so much more open	I was on a mission trip to Africa
Im not racist; im from Canada	I went to a very diverse school/lived in a very diverse neighborhood
I was picked on because I was	I lived in japan and was a

white/I grew up poor	minority, so I know what it is like to be a minority
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3. How can these claims exempt you from being a part of the problem?

a. What would the impact be on the person you are taking to?

## Recurring Questions

4. How has your understanding of whiteness progressed?
5. How do you sense God is calling you to respond?
6. What are your lingering fragile responses and why?
7. Are you sure you understand the Cross?

## Travis' Thoughts

Philosophical Food For Thought: there was a philosopher named Jean-Paul Sartre. Despite being a morally questionable human, he was also exceptionally brilliant. He wrote a wonderful little book called *Existentialism is a Humanism*. In it, he argued for the viability of something he called “existentialism.” Sartre thought that we humans do not begin life with what he called an “essence.” Instead, he argued that we first exist and then we create our essence. To understand what he is saying, think of a knife. The knife exists in reality—you can see it on the kitchen counter. But it had to be created in order for it to exist. And because things just don’t create themselves, someone had to think of the idea of a knife. In other words, someone had to have the idea in their mind of what a knife is and how it functions. Once that happens, only then can the knife be created; only then could it exist. The idea in the mind of the crafter is what Sartre calls “essence.” And for the knife, the essence comes before its existence in reality. What this means is that the knife has a very specific purpose that determines its function and existence. Now, Sartre argued that humans are *unlike* that of a knife. Humans

exist *first*, and then create their essence. While this creates great problems that Sartre addresses in the book, it also, I think, offers a helping hand for us to see how whiteness works. Whiteness—and racism—is the essence that we are born into, at least since the justification of America; DiAngelo says, “My identity, personality, interests, and investments will develop from a white perspective. I will have a white worldview and a white frame of reference” 73. Think of this quote by DiAngelo as the idea of the knife in the crafter’s mind. This, I think, is how racism works. Whether we like it or not, we are determined by the race we are born with, at least in America since its creation.